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Southern Ute Tribe Declares Disaster Over Mining Spill in Animas River

ICTMN Staff

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The Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the first to watch a 100-mile-long plume of toxic mining sludge flow through their reservation in the Animas River, has declared a state of local disaster.

“The cost and magnitude of responding to and recovery from the impact of the water contamination from the Gold King Mine Animas River Spill, caused by the EPA on August 5, 2015 is far in excess of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe’s available resources,” the tribe said in its declaration.

The spill, unleashed accidentally on August 5 by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency workers trying to remediate contamination at the Gold King Mine in Colorado, sent three million gallons of wastewater into Cement Creek, which flows into the Animas River and from there to the San Juan River, then to the Colorado River in Utah. Before making its way to the Navajo Nation, the plume containing heavy metals including arsenic and lead wound through the 1,059-square-mile Southern Ute reservation in Colorado.

RELATED: [Video: Toxic Mining Wastewater Spill Turns Animas River Lurid Orange in Colorado](#)

The EPA has been sampling the water up and down the spill route, but test results were still pending as of Wednesday August 12. Southern Ute tribal officials are also monitoring the situation, the tribe said in a statement, coordinating responses with other jurisdictions as well. Drinking-water testing is available to tribal members who live in the Animas watershed, the statement said.

“The environmental and economic consequences of this disaster will not be known for some time, but the Tribe is doing everything in its power to respond to this terrible situation and safeguard the health of our tribal members, the aquatic life, and other affected natural resources,” said Tribal Chairman Clement J. Frost in the statement.

Classifying it as a local disaster activates the response and recovery aspects and enables aid to be released. The worst of the plume of toxic sludge has already passed, but the lasting effects on water quality and wildlife is not yet known. Tribal officials said the river will be closed until at least Friday August 14.

Meanwhile, EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy visited Durango, Colorado and said the spill had passed and the water had returned to the condition they were in before it happened, the Denver Post reported on August 12. But she did not specify when it might be safe, or advisable, to reopen the river.

Read more at <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/08/13/southern-ute-tribe-declares-disaster-over-mining-spill-animas-river-161377>